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THE CLOSING DOOR

BY M. E. CROCKER

I AM apart, and yet, you do not know
That Death has marked me.

Great knowledge have I now, of life, of birth,
Of marvels of the earth I've loved so well;
Of wonders of the sky, the sea, sun's shine,
And how the little flowers have grown and died.
I know all these as you, you cannot know them,
For Death, wise, old, revealing Death,
Most ancient Death, has marked me.

I walk apart, and you—you do not know
How far away from all warm fireside ease
My feet are turned. Fenced by this high black hedge
I hear your voices, clear, and yet removed
As hear the deaf, a faint, a distant sounding.
Ah, it is narrow, cold, and lonely here!
And though to your eyes and your touch I am
Still close and present, yet the shadowed wall,
Invisible to you, is thick, impervious,
Since Death, Death single-eyed for me,
My Death, has marked me.

So do I walk beside you, still apart.
Hear what I know, more than you ignorant:
I know how all your old loves died, and how
All lovely laughing children went with him;
How all your mothers and your fathers wept
When they, too, felt his hand;—and so
Am well taught how they died, those who of old
Heard warning first, so brief or long as mine.
I know--and am made very free of souls,

Of all those thronged companion souls who watch
To see how we die, doing well or ill
Before we reach their habitations. All
This wisdom do I learn, apprenticed thus
To their acquitted tasks, their lessons said.
Ah, do you grudge it, plodders? Let me change
With your safe ignorance, who lack my skill!
My teacher's face is very stern and hard,
Grim Death, harsh Master Death
Austerely marks me.

But not yet has he taught me how to say
Farewells that bear no thinking, lest with thought
I scream at the inevitable blade—
He has but granted a release and gift
That sets me free from grievance slight; unscarred
By nettles in the path; aloof and cool
With knowledge that I live but half in life,
Freed from the torments that small wounds once made.

And yet, it is the little things I've loved
That bring the hot tears to betray my eyes,
To catch my heart, as warmly beating on
And easily, as if it never heard
Its beats were numbered, told.
The thousand daily acts and plans, that turn
And look at me, and say—No, nevermore.
It is the sudden stopping thought that falls
As this—that shuts the year's door in my face
To leave me standing, cold, forlorn, without
Belovèd gates, where gardens wide shall hold
Their tall sword leaves of iris, mounting guard
O'er royal standards, where lost Rhine-gold gleams,
And the court purple's velvet tempts my touch,
And I—shall be away! Where blooms the soul
Of April's beauty, streams the heart's eye sees
Where pure white moonshine on the greensward flows—
Narcissus pouring scented loveliness
From lavish blossoms to the spring's white night;
Or daffodils' rich caskets filled to brim
With sunlight, warming to a living glow
The cold north pathside with a June-time gold.

Oh, where shall I see these! On what wide fields
Shall I, O snatching Death, be set to till!
In what way shall I find the tender souls
Of all belovèd flowers blooming there!
They—they have learned and found
Their resurrection yearly—I learn now
My burial with their brown hearts comes too.
Shall there come resurrection in a flower
Flaming a soul of beauty? I will learn,
I can go down with him, my Death—and yet,
How can I learn what comes, what comes—again!
O mighty shrouded Death, tell me but this,
What comes, since you—you, dark, and very still,
Most silent gardener Death,
Have marked me!

M. E. CROCKER.